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# THE CEA CRITIC

Vol. No. XXI—No. 9—Published at Springfield, Mass. Editorial Office, University of Mass., Amherst, Mass. December, 1959

Two business reply envelopes are enclosed with this issue of *The Critic*. Use one to renew your membership. Give the second to a colleague who should be one of us but isn't. Tell him about CEA and persuade him to join! Let's double our forces!

## CEA ANNUAL MEETING PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO, ILL. MONDAY, DECEMBER 28

The College English Association will meet in the Grand Ballroom Foyer, with registration beginning at 4:15 p.m. The annual program will have as its topic, "Scholarship and Poetry." Speaker, John Ciardi, Rutgers University, Poetry Editor, *Saturday Review*, and CEA President; address, "How Does a Poem Mean Man?" This meeting will be followed by a social hour and dinner beginning at 6:45 p.m. (Quadrangle Club, 1155 E. 57th St.), followed by the Annual Meeting. (A breakfast meeting of regional CEA leaders will be held in the Stouffer's Restaurant, 111 So. Wabash, on Tuesday morning, 7:30-8:45 a.m.)

## TRAGEDY AT TUFTS

The Fall meeting of the New England C.E.A., held at Tufts University, on November 14, 1959, was fed almost exclusively on a diet of tragedy. The talks were delivered generally in "the grand style" (save Norman Holland's talk on "The Bard and the Couch: Psychoanalysis and Shakesperian Tragedy"; I was unable to attend the symposia on "The Scholarly Paperback and the Teaching of Literature" and "The Basic Issues in the Teaching of English"—but anyone teaching either literature or composition knows how fraught with cathartic implications the pedagogic experience can sometimes be); the unity of tone was generally adhered to by both the speakers and the questioners from the audience.

It seemed almost sacrilegious to insert a Bacchanalian thrust into so august a body; everyone wanted to express the "damp, drizzly November in . . . [his] soul". After it was all over, the members of the various groups filed out—purged, sobered, exalted, saddened, with a renewed dedication to their chosen task of making their students see how enjoyable an experience the reading of literature can be.

The opening address, "The Teacher and the Tragic View," was delivered by Eric Havelock, chairman of the Department of Classics at Harvard University. He began by analyzing Euripides' *Hippolytus* from the traditional frame of reference. The hubris of the classical tragic hero, Hippo-

## RESTORING LIFE TO FAULKNER'S THE HAMLET

It seems to the reader of critical and professional journals today that we have transformed the discoveries of twentieth century poets and critics into a new set of rules and with misguided fidelity are insisting upon their application in the classrooms of America. Perhaps they should be called not rules but "unities," which are ingeniously discovered in works of literature whether or not they are in fact there, or are pronounced the form of the work when they are only part of it. Is it not time for more subtlety and imagination in our teaching of literature? Can we not use with greater sophistication the discoveries of formalist and anthropological critics? If we cannot, we shall be cheating our students of the opportunity to study whole works of literature—works different from: one another, works extending their experience of life and language and not restricting it to the same round of mythological patterns, Christian symbols, and primitive rituals.

Faulkner's novels—to speak of a contemporary writer who clearly makes use of mythological elements—seem to be suffering very markedly from the imposition of various sorts of unities. The life which his

characters lead is no doubt unfamiliar to many teachers and students, who have never known a village, a farm, an idiot, or a family on the downgrade; and this social fact may account for some of the abstract discussions of his people and stories. For much of it is abstract, as if Faulkner wrote not about people living some place, but about figures mythologically arranged (for unity), or automata acting out patterns with watches and clocks in a kind of ballet mecanique, or "symbols" of confinement, say, when they are actually people shut up in back lots.

Can we not do better than this in our teaching of a good modern writer? *The Hamlet*, for example, can be an enlarging experience for young people if they are asked to give full attention to the story and assisted to see what it really is. V. K. Ratliff is not the fisher king and the story is not organized as a waste land myth around Eula as earth goddess. She certainly has some of the traits of an earth goddess—including the grotesqueness of hunger and sex (like William Carlos Williams's Sea Elephant she cries "I am Love" and "Feed me!"). But she and Ratliff are in a different story from *The Waste Land*.

It is a story about how a group of evil people take over a Southern community centering in Varner's store at the crossroads. Students who read it should of course perceive that it has its mythical enrichment; they will perceive that the study of the success of evil has a more general American and human applicability. But they should begin with an imaginative understanding of the particular story in all its richness.

Reading this novel can extend their experience of American life and of language as expressing it. They can learn something of what a community like the hamlet is and how people live in it and speak to one another as a result. (The elliptical style of this conversation is at the outset as difficult for urban students to follow as the allusive talk of another unknown world in Henry James). If they can notice the passion for horsetrading, the style of combat so to speak, which is a science and a pastime and gives these people their code, they can begin to understand both the community and the form of the novel. They can begin to see that people really use the tall tale which, with the game of trading and outwitting, gives the novel's sections and its whole their formal structure. And if students are noticing the bareness, exposure, and danger of these small farmers' lives, they can imagine why Tull and Bookwright do not speak out directly and yet are fond of exaggerated speech from behind their mask. They can conceive why

(Please turn to p. 5)

(Please turn to p. 4)

## THE CEA CRITIC

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THE KING IS DEAD—LONG LIVE  
THE KING

The editorials this fall reviewing the contribu-  
tions to CEA of Burges Johnson, Bob  
Fitzhugh, and Max Goldberg were written  
not as epitaphs, as Bob supposed, but at  
the suggestion of Donald Lloyd to lead up  
to an announcement we are about to make.

By vote of the national directors of CEA,  
the executive secretaryship passes on Janu-  
ary 1, 1960 from the able hands of Max  
Goldberg to the able hands of John Hicks.

Director of English Studies at Stetson  
University, John Hicks has been chairman  
of the honors program at Stetson since  
1958. He has directed the humanities course  
since 1952 and has held many important  
faculty posts. He was regional director of  
CEA from 1955-56 and has been a member  
of the committee on regional development.  
He has published textbooks, guides, and  
scholarly articles, has held many scholar-

ships, and has taught at the Univ. of  
Louisville, at Mississippi State College,  
Purdue, Miami, and Lawrence. He holds  
the Ph.D. from Iowa State.

The new editor of *The Critic* will be  
Donald A. Sears of Upsala College. He  
holds a Bowdoin College A.B. and a Har-  
vard M.A. and Ph.D. He taught at Lowry  
Field and Dartmouth College before going  
to Upsala. He is the author of textbooks  
and workbooks and is a past president of  
the Greater New York CEA and a national  
director of CEA. He has been on the staff  
of many CEA institutes. He has done edi-  
torial work for *Good Reading* and for Har-  
court, Brace and Co., he has developed  
courses for the American Institute of Bank-  
ing, and is a member of many professional  
societies.

Change within reason is a good thing,  
and it would be unfair for our organiza-  
tion to impose itself too long upon any one  
man or group of men. The Managing Editor  
is of course sorry to give up his work on  
*The Critic*, because it has brought him  
great joy; but on the other hand he is  
glad to rid himself of a very time-consuming  
chore. What it means to get out month-  
ly *Critics*, sometimes on top of a 21-hour  
teaching load, and this semester on top of  
a daily half-hour TV program, can be im-  
agined only by someone who has tried!  
No wonder letters have not always been  
answered on time and mistakes have crept  
into the pages of *The Critic*.

But under its new leadership, CEA will  
take on renewed life and vigor and will  
flourish and prosper as it has in the past.  
The best of luck to John Hicks and Don  
Sears! Long live the King!

L. E. H.

I have been a reader of *The CEA CRITIC*  
since January, 1952, and I have read every  
copy published since that date. However,  
never before have I read such a mish-mash  
of alphabetized soup as the bit titled, "Re-  
port of the Joint Committee of the ASEE,  
NCTE, MLA, CCCC, IRE, STWE," which  
appeared in the October, 1959, *CRITIC*.

The following quotations were particu-  
larly enlightening. "Teachers, he said, must  
be trained to define English as an aesthet-  
ic approach, a critical evaluation and an  
expression of an idea." Really? Or, "He  
wants an involvement with various schools  
and colleges." And this choice sentence:  
"To articulate with teachers of English in  
the high schools." Yikes. What a waste of  
ink!

What was it about the blank page being  
the most perfect poem?

Harvey Olson  
Wethersfield, Conn.

## One Thing Is Too Often Profaned

The use of the word "thing" in any of its  
epiphanies is a cowardly device of the vague  
mind. Actually, when you try to discover  
what "thing" means, you find that it means  
so much, it means—nothing. "Thing" ap-  
plies to objects: that thing on the ground.  
It applies to ideas: this a good thing! It

applies to deeds or to actions; thus Hem-  
ingway: "Why do you do this thing, Este-  
ban?" Even Oscar Wilde claimed that "...  
each man kills the thing he loves," and  
couldn't decide whether someone "... had  
done/A great or little thing." To Mellors,  
the gamekeeper, "thing" had yet another  
referent.

Obfuscation could be avoided if every  
writer saw clearly that what he calls a  
"thing" has a positive and definite name  
and classification. Eliminate at least nine  
out of ten "things" from writing, and clar-  
ity be served! For instance, a man has  
separated from his wife. He shows up later  
at the apartment and declares to her "I  
have come for my things." What he has  
come for are his belongings—his gun,  
camera, golf clubs and clothes. In short,  
he has come for his stuff. He should say  
so! And see how much improvement attends  
to Wilde's line when you re-phrase it: "Yet  
each man kills whatever he loves." There  
may not be much poetic improvement, but  
the line certainly sounds more honest.

Henry Fielding had a lot to say about  
combined "things." He quarreled with the  
old proverb, "Ex nihilo, nihil fit." "... as  
Nothing is not Something, so Everything  
which is not Something is Nothing; and  
wherever Something is not, Nothing is: a  
very large allowance in its favour, as must  
appear to persons well skilled in human  
affairs."

I am not philosopher enough to say what  
Fielding's words really mean; but I know  
that they do not strengthen the case of  
the flabby "thing" as a word of dramatic  
force. And Fielding, you notice, said nothing  
of "anything." However, this thing's get-  
ting much too complicated for an old thing-  
hater like me.

Dorothy Norris Foote  
San Jose State College

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## LATIN VERSUS ANALYZERS

There is no such thing as traditional, or old-fashioned grammar. There is no such thing as structural grammar. There is only grammar.

Structural linguistics as exemplified in Lloyd and Warfel's *The American Language in its Cultural Setting* (hereafter referred to as *ALCS*) is to me one of the strangest of educational aberrations. It gives a new vision of language, say its authors, and a new orientation of thought regarding it.

'But do we need a new vision of language? Is there, in fact, after all these centuries, any such thing? The one we have always had with us sufficed for the good and the great of Old Harvard and for everyone else.

I have tried, in a melancholy way, to see something worthwhile for students in the vast, rolling nomenclature panorama of the new science for learning English (So far as I know there are no applications of it abroad), and have come away from the struggle in a dazed and bedraggled frame of mind. How much more unsatisfactory must the plight of the young, linguistically unripe host that has striven of late to drive in its wedges to split this language thing open—via phonemes, morphemes, clusters, junctures, markers, warners, signalers, determiners, and all the rest, stretching out to the crack of doom!

Were Lloyd and Warfel ever young? I will give them credit for having been (perhaps for still being, and I feel sure they never had thought of a quarter of what the book contains before they started on its composition and worked up the necessary self-excitement. Only by the most furious cogitation could they have amassed and welded together the bewildering network of intricate concepts that had lain fallow until now (and never really been missed by human society).

This is not to say that there are not features in the book, more or less unrelated to the missionary black-ink part on structure, that even this writer must approve. Like the *One-Hoss Shay*, the volume has been so built that it couldn't break down, that is, not everywhere for everybody. It would be entertaining enough to read the thousand and one ingenious details of language contained, if only the authors would not insist that these constitute diet of sufficient nutrient value in themselves, apart from Latin and other old things like that.

Harvey's *English Grammar*, revised edition of 1878, which I hold in my hands, had none of the abstruseness and abstractness of the *ALCS*. It was marked by utter plainness and simplicity. It said the same things as Lloyd and Warfel, but without the latter's unending and therefore confusing embroidery. New Vision indeed! But what for?

In the *ALCS* we have a wide and ingenious assortment of illustrative words and sentences. But they are of the earth earthy. In the Harvey, on the other hand, there is a packing in from cover to cover

wherever feasible of extracts from the riches of world literature. When you have diagrammed "Near yonder corpse, where once the garden smiled, etc.," you have gone quite a way in the plastic years to a memorization of words and thoughts you will never willingly let die. The forces of the *ALCS* do not bear on such supreme desiderata for the formation of personal style as well as of personal character.

In diagramming, indeed, old but ever verdant practice, there is involved everything the structuralists try so prodigiously to convey along nuclear-fission models. But how much more rational and to the point are the diagrams! How much quicker-acting upon the mind! How infinitely more zestful!

Harvey's grammar did not specifically urge Latin upon aspirants to fulness in English. It had indeed no occasion to do so, being composed at a time when Latin was normally and naturally accepted and pursued as essential aid to English, and as foundation for the study of several other related foreign languages.

The makers of the dictionaries (not bad fellows to emulate) also knew their Latin. "Structure" was not dinned into them from studenthood as the thing wherewith to catch the conscience. They did pretty well with language. The inexplicable feature about them, as with Lloyd and Warfel, is that they never breathe any public word to modern youth that it might study Latin to advantage. Not even in the lengthy discussion on how to build a more powerful vocabulary (in 30 years!) do the authors of the *ALCS* suggest that a long, running start to that end is implicit in translation of Caesar, although they themselves went through precisely that experience. Again, very strange!

The *ALCS* indeed set itself a stupendous task. It said in effect to the college students of America ("It may be used in the freshman composition class;" it may be used "by any person who has to deal with language as part of his work"): Come to us without one plea, that is, without Latin, with a starvation vocabulary, with no consecutive knowledge of how words are put together. We will not only set you promptly on the road to good English, but we will also promote in you a wise reader's enthusiasm, and furnish you besides all the elements needed for adequate style in writing.

We may note here that the same resounding appeals and promises, accompanied by method-devices never dreamed before, have characterized many recent language textbooks in the fields of French, Spanish, German, etc. These, like the *ALCS*, usually stretch to considerable length—evidence in part of the authors' consuming solicitude. They do not last any length of time. They mount, they shine, evaporate and fall, leaving in the minds of older teachers nostalgic memories of the old grammars like Fraser and Squair's (French) that ministered to the intellectual and esthetic pleasure of decades.

In like manner the teaching of English by description and endless analysis will probably "vanish" before so very long. All this elaborate tabloidal spoonfeeding, this linguistic lifting by linguistic bootstraps, will not work. You can draw up tables of patterns and clusters, slash the pages with curved and straight lines, dots, dashes, arrows, and so on, but you are not thereby, as you may think, communicating your obvious knowledge to the end of life to the reader or listener. What you are doing is merely to clarify your own information and its sources. You have done yourself some intellectual good, but you have not done a great deal to the captive student, passive because unformed by intellectual early efforts or the help of Latin. Lloyd and Warfel would undoubtedly, in the goodness of their hearts, like to pass on to us fully cooked and predigested their knowledge of Latin, German, Anglo-Saxon, Old English, as well as all the novelties of "structure." But the reminder is in order that the student learns by drawing up his own "tables," and not by farming out his Latin and other linguistic responsibilities.

A. M. Withers  
Concord College

## RICHARD CORY

Harry R. Garvin's interesting reinterpretation (October Critic) of one of my favorite poems, "Richard Cory," leads me to publish, at long last, my own insight (drawn as much from reality as from poetic sensitivity) into the reason for Richard Cory's suicide. Briefly, it is this: he had just received word of some great good fortune occurring to his dearest friend, and under the circumstances, there was really nothing else a gentleman who had everything could do.

Donald Lloyd · Wayne State University

## THE THIRD DAY AT GETTYSBURG: Pickett's Charge

Alan M. Hollingsworth

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### Restoring Life to Faulkner (Continued from p. 1)

Ratliff in his way uses it to express his disgust at the Snopes. (They should hear a good deal of the opening sections, at least, read aloud, for the pleasure of it and to hear a comedy which both exaggerates and understates.) In these ways they may see how Faulkner has shaped the lives of these people into a story by means of the only tradition they have and so has acknowledged both it and them.

And they need not, as certain critics have suggested they must, consider the organization of *The Hamlet* so arcane that it must be revealed by some mythic, symbolic formula. Nor will it seem diffuse. Some previous knowledge of the structure of American humorous narrative will help, but even if students simply follow the book where it leads them, relying upon its language and detail, upon the movement of incidents, upon the impact of character on character, and the sometimes marked, sometimes subtle, variations of tone, it is likely that the possibilities of the tall tale as used by a humane and sophisticated writer like Faulkner will unfold.

Constance Rourke describes the tradition in which Faulkner writes: "Many of the tales and much of the talk [of the frontiersmen] verged toward that median between terror and laughter which is the grotesque; and some plunged into the monstrous." (*American Humor* (N. Y., 1931) p. 50). Students, in discussing the book, find it possible that a narrator's imagination can operate in this way and still say profound things about human beings and social history. As in the tall tale, "a bright trail of fact [fixes] the attention of the listener" at the beginning of *The Hamlet*, and "this trail seems natural." (*Ibid.*) The concrete sociological rightness of the opening description of Frenchman's Bend establishes the milieu out of which a Snopes can come and in which he can operate. The deadly precision of his rise, feared by an intelligent man like Ratliff and watched point by point with fascinated credulity by the onlookers at the store, can become part of the students' experience also. At last towards the end of Book I, they are ready for the full measure of the comedy. "Just what is it going to cost me to protect one goddam barn full of hay?" Ratliff imagines the outraged and outsmarted Jody Varner asking. A few pages later the answer is given by one of the onlookers who is reporting to the bench-sitters at the store that he has seen Will Varner and his partner together at the Old Frenchman's place. "It was Flem Snopes setting in that flour barrel," he adds as if innocent of all implication, thus bringing the tall tale of matching wits (wise, generous Ratliff against shrewd, selfish Snopes) and the victory over the community to its first exaggerated but inevitable serio-comic climax. It is but a step—although perhaps only a Faulknerian version of a tall tale would ask anyone to take it—to the next episode of natural fact and poetic truth,

where readers are asked to see Eula, the youngest of lusty Will Varner's sixteen children, as both country wench and earth goddess. We know, with Faulkner and Ratliff, that in one sense she is only "gal meat," but won by the frontiersman's response to sex and nature and to the extravagant in human experience, we believe that she can both sit "on the schoolhouse steps at recess . . . eating a cold potato" and "[postulate] that ungirdled quality of the goddesses in . . . Homer and Thucydides." In a rural community, a rising man like Flem Snopes can marry such a daughter of the man who owns the village, just as surely as she can draw a swarm of boys at a dance; and "a bright trail of fact" leads quickly and boldly to a symbolic elaboration of the Snopes's conquest of the land—a deepening aspect of their degrading power and temporary victory. The meaning is felt and the form perceivable because Eula, Flem, and Frenchman's Bend are all imagined from reality.

Books III and IV are also episodes of Flem Snopes's power over Frenchman's Bend. The community here is not a waste land, deprived of its fertility goddess, although Eula is in Texas—where the socially disgraced in frontier society go to tide it over for a while—and the summer is long and dry. (Doubtless the extremities of the climate heighten the people's nerves and render them more impressionable to the events which follow.) The bizarre story of Ike and the cow—which is, of course, a comment on Flem and Eula—and Ratliff's firm, decent triumph over the moral hypocrisy of I. O. Snopes, the life and murder of Houston, the anger and terror of a human Snopes (Mink) and his disgust at the failure of Flem to fulfill the inalienable duties of kinship, the helpless greed for the horses which makes it possible

for Flem to dupe almost everybody at Frenchman's Bend, and then the duping of Ratliff—all these develop with energy, aggressiveness, and shifts of tone the power of Snopesism and its destruction of human values. If comic realism merges into romance and mythology, it is all part of one vision provided by a community, by a narrative tradition reflecting American experience, and by Faulkner. Students can come to realize that the "unity" of *The Hamlet* lies in the richness of this vision and its narrative method: these tell what a Snopes is, and with equal imagination, the strength of his adversaries. They can see a comedy which is at once full of cruelty and of humanity.

Students can look too at particular passages and enjoy perceiving that their language has a character of a particular kind because it is part of this story. In the beautiful passage in Chapter I of the Fourth Book, for example, they may listen to a conversation which begins by Ratliff's remark to a group of men at the store after the spotted horses have arrived: "A fellow can dodge a Snopes if he starts lively enough . . . You folks ain't going to buy them things sho enough, are you?" The men talk of past swaps, and then of the mocking bird, which is, like them, a shadow in the moonlight. They inhabit nature and both Faulkner and they use it as a language. For in the conversation we hear them quietly talking of why the bird sings first in a gum (the third man knows how the bird feels: the gum is the first tree to put out) and then moving to a small argument and joke about the willow—is it a tree or a weed, or neither? At the end of this little passage we discover that they are answering Ratliff's question, for the fourth man speaks of willow as neither tree nor weed but something continually

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to be grubbed up and continually reappearing. As one of our students said when we discussed this passage: "If you have ever tried to grub up willows, you know he is talking about the Snopeses." Had she not observed that the short passage has its comedy and poetry which intimately combine the reticence and shrewdness of the farmer's thought in the language of their daily lives?

Young people who are taught to conduct their own investigation into the works of literature which they read instead of applying unities from without have an opportunity to extend their experience as human beings and realize the experiences that they have had. It is a kind of human connection at least as living as participation in myths and more important in the modern world. We recall a college senior who once said, after reading *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet*: "I remember I saw something in the peanut country of Tennessee. Why did I forget to remember it?" It was a scene of a family scrambling to pick up a broken sack of peanuts worth eight cents. They can see further how a great writer makes a form out of particular observations of understood life. This must encourage them, if they are writers themselves, to notice that all the possibilities of subject and form are not exhausted, and, if they are readers and citizens, to conceive that new kinds of books may appear. On the other hand, if we set before them only abstractions and allegorical forms, they may well ask in the words of another of our students: "If every new work is simply a rewriting of *The Waste Land*, why does anyone ever need to write another book?"

Caroline G. Mercer  
Susan J. Turner  
Vassar College

### Tragedy at Tufts (Continued from p. 1)

ment, so that the readers—or the audience—will get the moral message and govern their lives accordingly chastened and forewarned.

The only difficulty with this view, according to Prof. Havelock, is that it is not the Hellenic view. The Hellenic view held—and probably with a greater sense of realism—that man was not an autonomous agent, acting with absolute freedom of choice. Hippolytus is faced with the choice of choosing between a Scylla and Charybdis—in his case, between serving Aphrodite and Artemis. Hippolytus chose Artemis—but he chose not wisely. Wisdom does not consist in choosing between one of two extremes. Man should propitiate as many forces as possible. It is the mature steering between two extremes (and to these extremes, post-Hellenic critics have misapplied the word *Ideals*) which constitutes the quintessence of moderation—the golden mean of Hellenic drama.

Blindly following an extreme—even the adoration of one deity to the exclusion of

attempting to propitiate the other gods in this polytheistic universe—is to be guilty of monomania. The wisdom of pluralism, Prof. Havelock implied, is something the modern world can well adopt. Fundamentally, however, the chief point of Prof. Havelock's lecture was that it is both unscholarly and unwise to superimpose on the works of previous generations the values of one's own era. This chronological anarchy is not only inaccurate but an act of analytical legerdemain.

Maxine Greene, of the Department of English and Philosophy at New York University, began the afternoon sessions by discussing "Tragedy in the 20th Century Novel." There was a tremendous amount of material in her prepared lecture—so much, in fact, that she had to eliminate some of it to adhere to the rigorous time schedule.

Her talk ranged from a discussion of the concepts of tragedy held by Aeschylus to those inherent in the works of Albert Camus. The tragic writer is one, she maintained, who gives his readers his subjective reaction to the perplexities of life. The question the tragic writer always asks is "Why?" Why should there be so much apparent injustice, so much suffering, so much failure to understand the incongruities of life? The tragic writer never clearly arrives at answers to his probing; his significance lies in his defiant challenge hurled at the intractable forces arrayed against him.

Although the answers are never arrived at, all tragic writers give us intimations of man's glory, and this glory is attained when man realizes his powerlessness. It is this attainment of recognition of his powerlessness through his powerful penetration of the mystery of the ineluctable forces—which constitutes for the tragic writer the reward for his agony of creation, and for the reader, the compensation of his purgation.

And yet, Prof. Greene stressed, the tragic writer of today is quite a different person from the writer of previous generations. For the modern tragic writer, man is no longer the glorious apex of a well-ordered humanity, but a fragmentized figure for whom the previous props of theology, morality, and a positive teleology have been shattered in the mushroom clouds of nuclear fission, deterministic economics, and libido-oriented psychology. Modern man's plight is shown in the novels of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Mann, Ignazio Silone, Thomas Wolfe, Albert Camus, and others. And the meaning of all these modern tragic writers is that modern man, despite his loss of the traditional bulwarks, must not take the apparent injustices and incongruities of life lying down. He must continue to probe, to challenge—herein lies his affirmation. It is the affirmation of heroically unheroic Leopold Bloom, of Camus' rebel, of Thomas Mann's Hans Castorp. Perhaps it is superfluous to add that Prof. Greene's view of the modern tragic view is essentially existentialist.

Milton Stern's talk, entitled "Tragedy

and Melville's Modern View," tried to demonstrate the modernity of Melville's tragic vision. All of Melville's books, Prof. Stern tried to point out, demonstrate an evolution towards a modern rationale: that there is not a unified conception of reality, that what characterizes man's awareness of experience is the multiplicity of possibilities, perhaps best symbolized by the indefiniteness of the whiteness of the whale in *Moby Dick*. It is not Ahab's monomania which should be taken as an index to Melville's concept of tragedy, but rather the frightful modernity of Pip's thrice-repeated statement regarding the interpretation of the doubloon, "I look, you look, he looks, ye look, they look," and then climaxed by Pip's "And I, you, and he; and we, ye, and they, are all bats; and I'm a crow, especially when I stand a'top of this pine tree here. Caw! caw! caw! caw! caw! caw!" Pip, of course, is here the Shakespearian fool, from whom emanates much wisdom. It is this multiplicity of vision which makes Melville not so much a tragic writer but a modern writer aware of the existentialist position that man is an orphaned alien of the universe and consequently he has to lower his grand vision of attaining unattainable felicity.

Finally, the danger of being monolithic in one's concept of tragedy was pointed out by the last speaker of the day, George Hemphill of the Department of English at the University of Connecticut, who spoke on "One Tragic Style—Or Many?" By presenting excerpts from the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Shaw, and the Bible, Prof. Hemphill concluded that it is not one thing which makes for tragic style—that it is not just poetry (and if poetry, which form?) or prose, but a combination of many ingredients: (1) the

(Please turn to p. 6)

## CROSS

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(Continued from p. 5)

language common to the period (2) the stamp of the individual writer's own genius (3) and the principles of "good writing" in general. The tragic or "grand" or elevated style, therefore, is neither one nor many, but rather one and many. It is an individual style within an historical context.

The many questions which followed each talk—although couched in the somber tones befitting the solemnity of the occasion—demonstrated that the function of the tragic writer to interrogate is by no means confined to the tragic writer. There were questions seeking clarification, questions indicating the interrogator's disagreement with comments by the speaker, questions demonstrating sympathetic agreement with the speaker's contentions. Most of the audience, however, seemed to abide by Milton's words, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

I should like to ask one question myself. "Has anyone seen Falstaff?" I miss him sorely. What a tragedy!

Milton Birnbaum  
American International College

### "THE DRIFT OF THINGS"

Was it "ever less than a treason to go with the drift of things", as Robert Frost so poignantly said in "Reluctance"? Do we, as teachers of English, go with "the drift of things", because there is no other way to go?

Not too long ago—in the May 1959 issue of CEA Critic—A. M. Withers of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute made some penetrating comments about our misuse of the English language, which have given me many moments of thought.

It seems that the too-casual acceptance of the flagrant abuses of the language by the "masses who know us not" (I refer to a phrase used by the Managing Editor of Critic in October 1958) should be more than a challenge to teachers of English, who suffer silently or audibly, depending on one's personality, at the gross and vulgar manipulation of our language by advertising copy-writers, disc-jockey announcers, and weather report commentators. The inexpressively tedious lyrics to popular songs shatter what serenity seems to be left in the air waves. The beatnik jargon currently on the lips of those "in the know" shows to what extent and with what rapidity slang and jargon can slip into the language.

The "masses who know us not" demonstrate hourly that our language is inadequate to convey anything exactly.

"The masses" are not only deaf to verbal subtleties, but will remain so unless those who should be doing more to keep the language at a semi-literate level, at least,

cease to be complacent except in journals dedicated to the almost lost cause of trying to improve the oral communication of our students.

Are we like deaf people crying aloud in the wilderness of our own infirmity? Are we content to comment with self-complacent aloofness, at this slipshod language?

Are we as educators pointing the way to better communication? Why then, are we not reaching out to the "masses who know us not" as successfully as the masses are reaching out to us?

Is it a lost cause? "Was there ever a cause too lost, ever a cause that was lost too long?"

Clara M. Siggins  
Boston College

### "Why Find Time for Reading in Today's Busy World?"

Excerpts from Student Essays  
Collected by a Rueful Teacher of Freshman English

1. Reading is the root of all knowledge. (This is good—not like money.)
2. Any topic under the sun can be found in the library walls.
3. Books are the fundamental fight against monotony.
4. The reason a book is better than television is because when you must leave your book for any amount of time, you can return at any time and pick up where you left off.
5. Reading is the best food on which to nourish our hungry minds. The more you digest, the better you feel.
6. Reading can be so captivating. It can allure you into a dungeon of excitement.
7. With a good book you can fly over the Alps, or fight a tribe of hostile Indians, or lead a safari across the Belgian Congo.
8. I don't see how anyone can decipher this poem, unless he kept at it for fifteen minutes.
9. There is so much we can learn by reading great books. How to build a house, how to drive a car, how to cook a veal stew. Look at all our great men of yesterday and today. They were all eager readers.
10. The subject matter of this poem [a ballad] is not unusual or weird, because murder seems to be becoming an everyday thing today (which is too bad).
11. Then there is the English teacher (such as yourself) who reads constantly, for both enjoyment and education. You must have a fantastic mind to read so much.
12. From student essay on the origins and development of the American-English language:

"When the English language stepped off the boat into America, something else hit it. This was the Indian language."

Helen Cross Broadhead  
Univ. of Hartford

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## SOME ANIMADVERSIONS ON WRITING CONTESTS

Recently I helped judge a national writing contest for high school students. Each nominee for an award submitted three papers: an autobiography, an impromptu theme, and a "composition of no prescribed length or type." One of the directives to the judges attracted my interest and concern. "If a nominee's papers reveal no particular strength in content," I read, "the vote should almost certainly be NO, because tomorrow's leaders will have to have a mastery of much more than pretty words and the mere mechanics of writing."

Well, I thought, I could keep one critical eye on content and the other on pretty words and mere mechanics while searching for potential leadership. I read on. "On the other hand," the directive slyly continued (I would, then, have to add my two hands to my two eyes), "a nominee should usually be rejected if his writing is mechanically poor, unless it has the rough brilliance of a young Sinclair Lewis or Thomas Wolfe."

Stricken with a kind of ambidextrous strabismus, I arranged a four-way table: smooth brilliance with leadership, smooth brilliance without leadership, rough brilliance with leadership, and rough brilliance without leadership. It seemed desirable first to search for smooth brilliance with leadership.

After one reading of my batch of papers I realized that I had no smooth brilliance of any kind, with or without leadership. I decided to search through the papers for rough brilliance. Tomorrow's leaders would have to settle for rough brilliance—"the rough brilliance of a young Sinclair Lewis or Thomas Wolfe," the directive had said.

First I pondered the directive again. Were there really two kinds of rough brilliance, or was the reference to the young Sinclair Lewis merely redundant? With

some dismay I realized that I had not been directed to search for the rough brilliance of a young Salinger, Camus, Beckett, or even Kerouac. The brilliance of a young Wordsworth would probably appear as smooth brilliance, but what about the brilliance of a young Ginsberg? Would it appear smooth or very rough indeed? Dared I recognize, I further mused, young-Faulkner brilliance or young-Joyce brilliance?

And then the alarming possibility came to me of a really new voice, roughly brilliant in its own key and its own mood—a voice that defied classification, as precocious as Sagan, as fastidious as Keats, and as earnestly muddled as Colin Wilson, but all new and shiny and doubtlessly cacophonous and unintelligible, not merely roughly brilliant, to my middle-aged perceptions.

Shrugging off my deepest concerns, as judges must often do, I decided to look for young-Wolfe brilliance, as directed, and treat Sinclair Lewis items as redundant. Young-Wolfe brilliance would be a magnificent cascade of words, rushing and tumbling over one another in their haste to get to the office of the benevolent editor with his sensitive shears. My batch of papers, however, contained no cascade of words, not even a turbulent trickle. All was calm and bland. The little autobiographies began with date of birth, quickly summarized the early school years as a happy time, climaxed with high school sports, clubs, and prizes, and ended in a conventional cadence about this fine modern world of ours today. No one flicker of illiteracy redeemed the smooth dullness.

The impromptu papers, written as an answer to the teacher's question "What is a good book?" wound their short and weary ways through banalities to the universal conclusion that a good book both in-

forms and entertains. Like a TV commercial, perhaps. No student, it must be noted, mentioned either *Lolita* or *The Catcher in the Rye*. And the compositions of "no prescribed length or type" turned out to be definitely prescribed in length and type: little so-called short stories about summer camp, little poems about Mother Nature, all rhymed, and little essays on happiness. School, camp, birth, sunsets, tornadoes, boy friends and girlfriends were pictured dimly but sweetly, as on the family-room TV screen, adapted to modest suburban living.

I searched in vain for the word *lonely*, for some thrust against fate or some earnest prayer for grace. All human relationships seemed antiseptic. The anguish of inquiry and spiritual search, to say nothing of the anguish of puberty and daily living, was absent. Not only would tomorrow's leaders have to do without brilliance, they would apparently have to do without content!

What has happened? It's possible to hazard a guess. Young intelligent people are not being encouraged to find their own voices. Guts, tears, sex, belly laughter are taboo—at least in writing contests. The tears and laughter in the group of papers I read clung neatly to a sentimental norm. Either the young high school writers are really heartless—and sexless—or their potentially best writing has been hushed up. Possibly it has been sent to the principal's office as filth.

I think now that I'd rather read that so-called filth, even if I had to be a high school principal to find it, than to be an honored contest judge who gets to see only the so-called good writing. And may the term leadership be banished forever from the good company of literary excellence.

John A. Weigel  
Miami University

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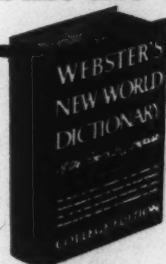
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## WRITING INTERESTINGLY

I looked over a discouragingly large pile of themes. "Not an idea in a carload," I muttered. True it was that some could not spell; others produced impossible sentence structures. Others left expressions dangling.

The most dismal situation, however, came from the fact that even those who had written with some knowledge of and respect for the conventional rules of grammar and syntax had nothing to say. While all freshman instructors face the problem of persuading students to learn and obey the rules, the greater problem lies in getting them to be observant, mentally alert, creative, and dynamic.

The solution of this intensely personal problem may lie partly with the group of which the individual is a part, but also lies partly with the instructor. Students will respond somewhat at least to an instructor who is himself alive, colorful, dynamic, and creative. If he is a methodical drone, a fussy perfectionist, a stolid realist, they are not likely to do anything remarkable on their own account. The inception of something to write about may take place as they watch the behavior and evaluate the efforts of their instructor.

Dignity and status are important to the stock in trade of the college instructor, but they do only so much. I feel that in the field of English in particular an instructor should come into every class with some fresh enthusiasm or discovery of his own to lay before the class. It may consist of a headline he has noticed, a picture he has seen, a paragraph from a book he picked up in an idle moment, a snatch from a hallway chat with a student or colleague, a bit of something he thought of when he first woke up that morning, a view he had from a bus while he was returning from a conference. It can be anything, from anywhere. The point is to make life interesting and vigorous and sparkling every day—to do something unusual and different with one's mind, to be more and more capable of finding the exceptional or to look at the ordinary in an extraordinary way.

Freshman composition writers ought to approach their task with some drill in sheer observation. Confront them, for example, with the layout of the campus they traverse to get to class. Have them describe it, with no previous notice. Send them rummaging in the library or on the athletic field. Dispatch them to a public meeting or to interview a neighbor. Have them watch traffic and auto drivers at a busy intersection in a rush-hour. Do something to make them open their minds and get busy thinking and putting items together. Increase their capacity to live, and at the same time you will assist in developing their capacity to write. If they have some personal experience which is real and vivid, they can do at least something to describe it.

Come into class with an unusual quip, a joke, be ready to capitalize on something

that comes up at the opening of class. Have a bag of attention-catchers and show yourself to be a bit puckish and aware of the humor and unusual qualities to be found in daily life. It is a pity that we try to write English compositions before we have had a course in psychology. This would be of real value. So would training in logic.

What is important is to make students put real value on mental alertness and creativity. The trouble is that so many want to write on matters far beyond their present experience or grasp—they thus become artificial and dull. Show them what can be done by beginning with a colorful story, experience or illustration. Then indicate that a short speech or essay should not have too many points. These should be organized and properly related to each other. There can be the type, for example, that features four points of equal value developed in order. This can be varied with a pattern of one strong point and then a weaker point. There also can be points arranged in an order of increasing power and vividness. There can also be types that eliminate what is not desired, leaving only a few points to be stressed. The patterns, of course, are many.

What is important is that the student be encouraged to be alive and to be an interesting person. If he is shown the value of being friendly, getting to know as many interesting people as possible, and taking advantage of all opportunities to pick up information and insights, he won't have too much trouble in finding something to write about. If he adopts a pleasing and interested air and keeps himself ready to accept what life brings him, he will find his academic task and his general educational task much simplified.

You can reach some of the unresponsive students by some little asides that are in themselves of no account. I told of the airplane passenger whose pilot "feathered" a propeller and then the passenger turned "chicken." When a colleague said that the first U. S. club was the Hoboken Turtle Club, I remarked to a class that this must have been a "hard-shell" group. When I saw a publisher's notice of the book entitled "How to Clean Everything," I suggested I might send it to the politicians in a certain city! This is a sample of how low this method can get!

I do not think the matter of effective freshman composition is one of successful mastery of a handbook on the rules for writing. I think it is more a matter of getting sluggish, shallow students to start observing, living, acting, responding. It is a psychological and social matter, rather than a grammatical one. It is a matter of getting them interested in people and in the world around them. When enough begins to happen inside these students, some of it must break out and find its way to paper! It is worth a try, anyway!

Richard K. Morton  
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